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OTX AWARDS

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TONY RICHARDSON

Lifelong Service Award

By Lee Gimpel

The average NFL career lasts less than four seasons. As he enters his 13th, All-Pro running back Tony Richardson credits his longevity to an unlikely source: community service. “Players who are involved in the community generally have longer careers,” notes this year’s winner of the OT Lifelong Service Award. “For me it created a lot of balance; my head wasn’t spinning from just concentrating on football,” the 34-year-old Richardson says.

After a long career with the Kansas City Chiefs, T-Rich signed during the off-

season with the Minnesota Vikings. The move spurred an emotional outpouring in Kansas City, where Richardson has fused himself into the city by becoming a fixture in community projects.

“The morning it came out that I was signing with the Minnesota Vikings ... I turned on talk radio and the whole subject was about me leaving Kansas City,” he recalls.

While playing with the Cowboys’ practice squad in his first year, Richardson watched Emmitt Smith’s commitment to the community—and took notes. “He found time to give back,

and I was like, ‘If this guy can do it, what am I?’ ”

When the Chiefs got a call looking for help in setting up a community initiative to get dictionaries into the hands of the city’s third graders, it was Richardson who adopted the idea. The project’s director, Chris Hope, told Richardson he needed a real partner, not just somebody to underwrite the charity. While Richardson’s five-figure contributions meant a lot, Hope says it Richardson’s presence and commitment gave the project life and credibility.

Others who have worked alongside Richardson offer the same feedback, noting that he’s not just fulfilling a contract clause. Indeed, he sits on the board of directors at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Kansas City, where president Dave Smith says he “sets the standard” and has raised the bar for what the organization would consider a good board candidate. Richardson’s MBA, which he earned by attending evening classes after practice, doesn’t hurt his value to the organization, adds Smith.

Even though he’s moved on to the Vikings, Richardson has continued to be involved in Kansas City. He commutes for meetings and still makes monetary donations, knowing that’s where he’ll settle down after football.

Richardson is well aware that his community efforts will only help him as he makes the transition to businessman. He has attended business boot camps for NFL players conducted by Harvard and Stanford, and he already has his hands in real estate, a restaurant and a radio station. In addition, he says there’s a front office position with the Chiefs that might interest him.

Very proud to win the same award claimed by Muhammad Ali last year, Richardson knows that his good fortune carries responsibility. “I’m tremendously blessed,” says Richardson, whose off-the-field resume is replete with accolades—including Pro Football Weekly’s Arthur S. Arkush Humanitarian of the Year award. “But with a blessing you need to bless other people as well.”



TONY RICHARDSON
2006

After serving as the Chiefs' most productive runner in 2000, Richardson moved to fullback in 2001 to make room for Priest Holmes—and has become the most valuable and versatile lead blocker in the league. The Vikings certainly know his worth; they signed the veteran in March.